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**Befehlstaktik and The Red Army Experience:  
Are There Lessons for Us?**

**A Monograph  
by**

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Military Intelligence**

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**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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### ABSTRACT

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(George W.)

The purpose of this monograph is to examine the tactical military command and control methods as practiced by the former Soviet Army and determine what, if any, lessons we can glean from the Red Army doctrinal experience.

The monograph first examines the Prussian-German theoretical underpinnings of Auftragstaktik and the reasons for the adoption of the philosophy by the US Army. The monograph then examines the development of the Soviet tactical command and control philosophy from its origins through the post nuclear era. The monograph examines how the Soviets researched and designed a command and control methodology that specifically supported their particular environment. The monograph determines that the most senior military and political intellectuals worked in consonance to ensure a longevity that has survived technological innovations.

The monograph concludes that, unlike the Red Army, the US Army has not integrated its doctrine with its practices. Training and actual combat operations continue to emphasize control rather than command. There is no centralized development of the doctrine nor is there consensus either among officers or the various branches on what mission-type orders are or how to implement them.

The monograph recommends development of a joint doctrine that would facilitate uniformity of doctrine for all services. This doctrine would be disseminated to all service academies, service schools and institutes of higher military learning. Failing that, the Army would establish a TRADOC level board to codify the doctrinal philosophy. It would provide the requisite qualified people and resources to implement its developments. Lastly, the Army should overhaul its personnel rotation system so that commanders, subordinates and key staff would spend the time together necessary to develop the cohesive team envisioned.

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## INTRODUCTION

Because of the nature of the world and the size and perceived potency of the threat, the US Army has advocated in its schools, manuals and professional publications the necessity of mission-type orders or Auftragstaktik; that is, tell subordinates what, where, when, and why, but not how, to accomplish a mission. Orders should be concise, imparting to a subordinate commander the higher commanders' intent, the subordinate's task, what resources he will be allocated and any constraints he must observe.<sup>1</sup>

The Soviets, in contrast, describe and practice an unnamed (by the West) centralized command and control process, which this study will label with the German term Befehlstaktik. Prior to the demise of the Soviet Union, writings by prominent Red Army officers and theorists have called for initiative and flexibility on the part of unit commanders. These terms, however, are not analogous to those of the West. They must be understood within the framework of Marxist-Leninist scientific justification.

The demise of the Soviet Union does not, or rather



should not, relegate the study of its armed forces and military philosophy to the periphery. The Red Army was the most ominous foe that the US ever planned to face, and it is still potent today. Equally important, many of America's potential adversaries have been organized, equipped and trained by the Red Army.

Finally, the US military's discussion on the dichotomies of the two philosophies are incomplete. Our system, a hybridization of Auftragstaktik, receives praise as the penultimate<sup>CW</sup>, while the system of our former foe is viewed as rigid, inflexible and robotic, and therefore bad.<sup>2</sup> But is this necessarily the case?

This monograph begins with a discussion of the Prussian origins of and German experience with Auftragstaktik and its integration into current US Army doctrinal thought. This early discussion of Auftragstaktik serves two purposes. First, it provides contrast to facilitate the understanding of Befehlstaktik and the Soviet experience. Secondly, it provides a framework for a later comparison of US and Soviet military practices.

The monograph will define Befehlstaktik in a Soviet context and trace the evolution of tactical doctrine in the perspective of its interrelationship

with the operational and strategic levels of war. Through historical examples from World War II, ~~or,~~ in Soviet terms, ~~the Great Patriotic War~~)<sup>3</sup> the study analyzes the effectiveness of this doctrine.

The monograph then analyzes post war doctrinal developments: the emphasis on nuclear war that dominated Soviet military planning from the late 1940s through the late 1970s; ~~and~~ and the reemergence of the primacy of the conventional, non-nuclear battlefield.

Lastly, the monograph evaluates the current success of the US Army's codification vis-a-vis its practice of the tenets of Auftragstaktik. The conclusion notes commonalities or similarities between US and Soviet practices, and makes recommendations for consideration by the US Army.

## AUFTRAGSTAKTIK AND THE US ARMY

Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.<sup>4</sup>

Auftragstaktik, a German term that many have interpreted roughly as "mission orders", "mission-type orders", or directive control<sup>5</sup>, is far more than simply describing a military order format or style.

Richard Simpkin may have best summed up the term with his definition:

The real basis of [Auftragstaktik]...is an unbroken chain of trust and mutual respect running from the controlling ...commander to the tank or section commander; with the [subordinate leader] themselves reading the instantaneous local situation and reacting to it in accordance with their understanding of the aim and plan.<sup>6</sup>

The Bundeswehr puts it similarly in their 1962 edition of Truppenfuehrung, where it stresses the need to "take immediate action in accordance with the superior commander's thinking" in the absence of a set task.<sup>7</sup>

More completely, Auftragstaktik describes a military philosophy. It is a concept that encompasses the unique nature of each war, desired virtues of leadership, relationship between senior and subordinate, command and control measures, and most

importantly, the inculcation of this philosophy by leaders' training and education.<sup>8</sup>

Auftragstaktik is a term that, despite what many observers use to describe the German Wehrmacht's concept of war, did not appear until 1945. It was used by former German generals as a way of describing their military philosophy. The West German Army did not adopt the term until sometime later.<sup>9</sup>

The origins of the philosophy of Auftragstaktik can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century. The Prussian Army discerned in the 1860s and 1870s that the battlefield was changing <sup>and</sup> the scale was becoming greater and forces were becoming more dispersed. As units scattered situations became more fluid and required unit leaders to either act on their own or remain static. Both conditions often proved disastrous.<sup>10</sup> The German Army's elastic defensive practices and offensive tactics in the latter part of World War I reinforced the requirement of initiative and creativity by (often) junior leaders.<sup>11</sup>

The perception by post-World War I German military leaders on the future nature of war strengthened the military institution's resolve to develop leaders at all levels capable of making independent decisions in

consonance with the higher commander's intent. German geography - located in the heart of Europe - and German political goals - eventual expansion both east and west - dictated that future wars would be fought on two fronts. Given the population strengths of probable adversaries, Germany would most likely fight outnumbered. As a consequence, the actions of small unit leaders i.e., platoon, company and battalion commanders, would be crucial to battles' outcomes. Additionally, the size, mechanization of ground forces and the advent of air power as a potent contributing arm indicated a marked increase in the size of the battlefield and the tempo with which armies would conduct operations.<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, the Prussian and German historical and philosophical influences dictated an almost metaphysical view of war. "War...is not the action of a living force upon a lifeless mass, but always the collision of two living forces...[the enemy] dictates to me as much as I dictate to him."<sup>13</sup> The "friction" and "fog of war" resulting from the clash of opposing and dynamic wills would result in unique combat situations at every instance. Therefore, meticulous planning beforehand was superfluous.<sup>14</sup>

The installation of a new philosophy such as Auftragstaktik did not happen overnight. As implied, the development and emplacement of Auftragstaktik was evolutionary - it took time. The pre-World War I years, the time permitted by the stasis of trench warfare, and the interwar years allowed the German military to institutionalize Auftragstaktik from top to bottom. This institutionalization spanned the entire spectrum of people, processes, and procedures.

Senior leaders were expected to mentor their subordinates in the desired leadership virtues. They spent time together participating in field and map exercises, terrain walks, and other "officer professional development" activities,<sup>15</sup> resulting in the camaraderie and closeness necessary for the reciprocal trust and respect that Auftragstaktik requires.

The training and education process codified terminology and principles. It enhanced common perspectives among officers of all branches and emphasized the fluidity of the battlefield and the ever changing nature of every battle.

Procedures were confined to individual soldier and crew drills.<sup>16</sup> Leaders were not taught what to think;

rather, they were taught how to "think on their feet", to make estimates and to apply proven tactical principles to a constantly changing environment.<sup>17</sup> Critiques or after action reviews were conducted in a non-adversarial fashion. Acrimony and aloofness were absent. The focus was purely professional: whether actions were tactically sound; were orders communicated effectively; did the action have a reasonable chance of success; and were these actions in keeping with and supportive of the higher commander's intent?<sup>18</sup>

The Achilles' heel of Auftragstaktik would appear to be attrition; specifically, the wartime loss of great numbers of the commanders imbued with this philosophy. Protracted war leads to the introduction of mass replacements, many of whom are the product of an accelerated military education and training process with little or no acclimatization to either their commanders or their units. The end result is a military system trying to function in the absence of its trained practitioners. The alternative is emplacing a new doctrine - a difficult prospect indeed in mobile warfare. Either can be disastrous.

The evidence indicates that the Germans, perhaps unconsciously, recognized this danger. Because of

geographic and political considerations previously discussed, speed was a vital factor in the new German war style. The Wehrmacht would have to quickly defeat an enemy and thereby hinder or prevent the forming of coalitions necessary for protracted war.



### THE US ARMY'S MOVE TOWARD AUFTRAGSTAKTIK

I do not propose to lay down for you a plan...: but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute it in your own way. (General Grant to General Sherman on the upcoming campaign against the South.)<sup>19</sup>

Awakening from a lethargy imposed by a decade plus spent fighting the jungle war in Vietnam, the Army and the nation refocused attention on the most potent threat to its <sup>sup</sup>interest <sup>in</sup> the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

At the national level, a strategic policy reassessment occurred in the early 1970s. Gone was the Truman Doctrine of opposing Communist expansion and aggression at every turn. The national strategy now focused on a revised, more narrowly defined priority of national interests. The 1960's policy was planning for "2 1/2 wars" in the 1960s (i.e., fighting one general war in Asia, one in Europe and "one half" in a regional hot spot). Current strategy calls for planning to fight "1 1/2 wars" <sup>(i.e.,)</sup> one general war in Europe plus "one half war", probably in the Middle East. This "one half war" either secures Israel's security or guarantees the uninterrupted flow of oil through the Persian Gulf.<sup>21</sup>

The new Nixon Doctrine further reduced the possibility of US forces intervening by stating that most, if not all, Third World nations would resist aggression on their own. The United States would provide materiel support only, unless the threat to a particular nation also directly affected the security interests of the United States.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the well publicized damage to the public image and internal morale of the US Army, the Vietnam conflict also exacerbated two additional concerns now recognized by senior Army leadership. First, the material intensive requirements of this war precipitated a stagnation in armored weapons design and procurement and gave the Soviet Union almost a generation's lead in these categories.<sup>23</sup>

Qualitatively, the Soviets had introduced three new series of tanks - the T62, T64, and T72 - and a new infantry fighting vehicle, the BMP. The United States still fielded the M60 tank and the M113 armored personnel carrier. Quantitatively, the Soviets had added five new armor divisions to its western forces and increased the number of tanks in the motorized rifle division from a battalion to a regiment.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, the helicopter-air assault-infantry war

in Vietnam, with its concomitant advantages in firepower and air power, provided few if any insights relevant to war in Europe. The end result was that ten years of war in Vietnam left the US Army ill-suited to protect America's European interests.<sup>15</sup>

The Army's response was twofold: implementation of an aggressive research and development program to facilitate the acquisition of badly needed armor and mechanized vehicle upgrades; and reformation of the tactical doctrine and training programs necessary to win on the envisaged battlefield of the future.<sup>16</sup>

While individual commanders historically have commented on the efficacy of allowing subordinates latitude in executing missions, the Army did not begin to institutionalize a philosophy of command and control decentralization until the early 1970s. This change in philosophy began with General William N. Depuy's assumption of command of the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command. Depuy, a veteran of World War II and Vietnam, had very definite opinions of the American soldier and his propensity for initiative. Simply stated, Depuy was not impressed. He perceived the average soldier to lack aggressiveness and to be reluctant to assume risk. These soldiers, because of

inappropriate training, could only execute specific, supervised orders and were incapable of taking charge in the absence of orders.<sup>27</sup>

Depuy did respect the German way of war - exacting losses defensively, blunting assaults, and launching localized offensives in a two front war - against numerically superior enemies. Similarly, Depuy admired the Israeli brigades' defeats of Egyptian divisions in the west and Syrian divisions in the north during the Arab-Israeli War of 1973.<sup>28</sup>

The analogies between the German situation in World War II, the Israeli dilemma in 1973, and the scenario currently anticipated by the post-Vietnam Army were obvious: potentially fighting a two front war against a quantitatively superior foe whose equipment may qualitatively equal the smaller's. Depuy recognized that bold action was necessary to prepare the Army for its next war.

Prior to Depuy's impetus, the Army had never officially published a warfighting philosophy. Previous field manuals and field service regulations were little more than drill manuals for formations or expansions on the roles of various arms and services.<sup>29</sup> Beginning with the 1976 edition of FM 100-5,

Operations, the Army began codifying a new warfighting philosophy. Units involved in future conflicts were likely, as a result of physical and electromagnetic reasons, to fight separated from sister and parent units. These isolated units were required to operate independently and follow mission-type orders.<sup>30</sup>

Later editions continued to stress the need for decentralization and expounded on the concept of mission-type orders. The nature of the threat had not changed. The requirement for commanders to act without constant supervision was still paramount:

Commanders must trust their subordinates to make correct on-the-spot assessments and decisions within the mission framework.<sup>31</sup>

...[S]ubordinates must act independently within the context of an overall plan...They must deviate...without hesitation when opportunities arise to expedite the overall mission of the higher force.<sup>32</sup>

The 1986 version of FM 100-5 continued in the same vein. The Army still envisioned major war as occurring far from US shores against an enemy that significantly outnumbered US forces:

...[U]nits will frequently {sic} have to fight while out of contact with higher headquarters and adjacent units. Subordinate leaders will be expected to act on their own initiative within the framework of the commander's intent.<sup>33</sup>

Commanders must...take time to train subordinate leaders,...requiring them to exercise initiative...by training them to react to changes which require fast, independent decisions

based on broad guidance and mission orders.<sup>34</sup>

The Army's newest keystone manual on warfighting, FM 100-5, Operations, (1992 Preliminary Draft) no longer alludes to a numerically superior enemy. The new FM 100-5 emphasizes that future conflicts can occur anywhere in the world and that potential threats still possess sophisticated weapon and support systems. Regardless of the uncertain threat, commanders require flexibility to accomplish constantly changing missions. Mission-type orders provide that flexibility:

The need for flexibility in command is greatest for the committed maneuver unit commander. He cannot depend on constant direction...He...must know the intent of the commander two levels above, [and] understand the concept of operation and intent of the immediate commander...The commander can, therefore, fight his unit confidently, anticipate events, and act freely and boldly to accomplish his mission with minimal guidance, particularly when he cannot communicate with his commander.<sup>35</sup>

In summary, the US Army, as did its German counterpart in World War II, recognized that future wars were likely to be fought against a numerically superior enemy which would probably have parity in quality. The actions of small unit leaders - platoon, company, and battalion commanders - would be important if the US was to fight outnumbered and win. The only way to do this was to allow subordinates maximum freedom of action to react to everchanging scenarios.

Mission-type orders provide that freedom. Doctrine still requires subordinate commanders to recognize the commander's intent. By eliminating the how, Auftragstaktik contains an inherent latitude. Commanders can analyze the current situation, recognize changes in the current tactical environment and, accordingly, execute operations that facilitate mission accomplishment.

BEFEHLSTAKTIK AND THE GENESIS OF SOVIET MILITARY  
PRACTICE

War is a science, a series of mathematical problems, to be solved through proper integration and coordination of men and weapons in time and space."

Befehlstaktik, in contrast to the initiative and imagination inherent with Auftragstaktik, has little or no room for flexibility by subordinate commanders. It is "detailed orders tactics" or "control by detailed order".<sup>37</sup> These orders dictate who, what, when, where and how. Mission-type orders that permit subordinates flexibility in conducting operations are not compatible with Soviet combat operations. Soviet commanders are expected to exercise detailed supervision over subordinates to ensure conformity between plan and execution.<sup>38</sup> Concepts espoused by Western armies - "an order is a good basis for a discussion" and "tactics are whatever the senior officer present thinks" - have no place in this rigid control process.<sup>39</sup>

While the specific form of government changed in Russia in 1918, little else did. The communists faced the same sort of problems their czarist predecessors had, as well as some problems unique to their new



political philosophy.

The nature of the society was still one of a largely agrarian and uneducated population existing at a subsistence level. Under the czars, a highly centralized government bound people to the land under a system known as serfdom. This idea of collectivism used the principle of service to the state to subordinate individual will and initiative. The communists only capitalized on this. Technological backwardness, slowness to adjust to new conditions, and a fatalistic attitude toward the future characterized the former Russian, now Soviet, people.<sup>40</sup>

The geography of the Soviet Union also presented unique military problems and influenced Soviet military development. The Soviet Union consisted largely of vast, uninterrupted plains and Russian battles historically involved forces, time and space on a vast scale.<sup>41</sup>

The underlying philosophical foundations of the new communist government additionally dictated a methodology for the construct of a military and how it was to function. First, in this new political philosophy, there is an inherent distrust of individualism and the bourgeois term initiative

associated with it. Individualism is necessary for the capitalist to manipulate and employ means toward private purpose. These means - competitiveness, aggressiveness, and a single minded dedication toward making a profit - are done at the expense and exploitation of others. The individual, like capitalism itself, was antithetical to the common good.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, Marxism <sup>proves</sup> believes that the history of mankind and all that has happened to man are the result of economic patterns that can be scientifically substantiated. A scientific study of actual historical events and societal evolution will reveal immutable "laws" whose truth is independent of what human beings believe.<sup>43</sup>

Three of the early Soviet Union's most capable military thinkers, M. N. Tukhachevskiy, V. K. Triandafillov, and A. <sup>gala</sup> A. Svechin, began early codification of the answers to the military problems identified by the new government.

Tukhachevskiy, a veteran of the Czarist Army and the Russian debacle of World War I, recognized the way war would be conducted in the Soviet Union in the future - mass armies, mechanization, and operations on a vast scale. His writings reflect his disdain for the

slogans of the "Russian spirit", "famous Russian bayonets" and the vacuous, meaningless emphasis on such concepts as elan and spirit espoused by du Picq and others.<sup>44</sup> Tukhachevskiy recognized that to impose a decisive defeat on the massive enemy forces likely to be faced it would be necessary to field forces of equal or greater strength. Furthermore, plans for operations must lay down the sequence and manner for destroying enemy forces. Effective control of battles on the scale envisioned should mean control of all battle processes.<sup>45</sup>

Triandafillov, a contemporary of Tukhachevskiy and also a veteran of the Czarist Army and World War I, is considered the "man of action" to Tukhachevskiy's position as "man of ideas".<sup>46</sup> Like Tukhachevskiy, he ridiculed the notions of his predecessors that emphasized the "talent of the commander", his "feel", and his "intuition".<sup>47</sup> Triandafillov saw these intangibles as platitudes and the reason for many of the defeats the Russian Army suffered in World War I. Recognizing both the conditions that existed in his time in the Soviet Union and the way of future war, Triandafillov was concerned that while "technical and cultural growth exists, mastery of new machinery and

technology presents problems".<sup>48</sup> He reasoned, therefore, operations at the tactical level must "be regulated by the tactical formations and the regulation norms developed for their actions which a commander must use...".<sup>49</sup>

Svechin served as both an officer of the Imperial General Staff and the Soviet Army. An observer of the Russo-Japanese War and veteran of World War I and the Russian Civil War, Svechin rose to assistant head of the military history department of the General Staff Academy. While Svechin is best remembered for his development and explanation of the "operational level" of war, he also commented on the role of tactics in the emerging Soviet doctrine:

Tactical art is more closely related to battle requirements. Battle requirements, given a specific kind of equipment, specific national cultural conditions, a specific theater of ...operations, and a specific intensity of the war...constitute a certain entity...[and this] is nothing more than technical topics...<sup>50</sup>

Having defined the military problem within its political, societal, and geographical parameters, the Soviet government tasked its best military intellectuals to resolve it. This began a pattern of close governmental and military cooperation that was to be repeated, except for the tragic and costly period of

Stalin's interference, throughout the history of the Red Army.

Tukhachevskiy and his contemporaries appreciated the threat posed by the Wehrmacht and the operational and tactical potential of Blitzkrieg. However, the experiences of Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War and the purges of the military during the late 1930s brought a three year halt to the refinement of Soviet military doctrine. The architects were gone -- Triandafillov died in a plane crash in 1931. Tukhachevskiy, branded a traitor and enemy of the people, was executed in 1937 along with most of the senior and mid-grade leadership.<sup>51</sup> Svechin followed in 1938. What then occurred was a time when the Red Army had a doctrinal theory whose authors it could not acknowledge and a political climate that forbade the sort of criticism necessary to revise and perfect the theory.

## WORLD WAR II: THE DEFINING EXPERIENCE

If a machine is to be a machine, then a cog must remain a cog.<sup>31</sup>

For the purpose of doctrinal analysis, the Soviets generally recognize two periods of World War II. The first extends from June 22, 1941, the date of the German invasion, to November 1942, when the tide turned at Stalingrad from defensive to offensive operations. The early months of World War II did nothing to verify or reinforce, particularly to outside observers, that the Soviets had either developed or implemented a successful doctrine for the tactical level. One senior German officer observed:

...[Junior Soviet officers] are clumsy and unable to [make] decisions. Purely rigid training squeezed the lower commanders into the vice of manuals and regulations, and robbed them of the initiative and originality...<sup>32</sup>

An examination of the Soviet situation reveals, however, that the Red Army was not following - nor was it capable of following - its prescribed doctrine. The initial German onslaught caught the Soviet military unprepared spiritually and materially. In the early months, Soviet commanders at all levels displayed ineptness. They were unable to construct coherent

defenses and displayed an alarming propensity for launching ill-conceived and costly counterattacks that had no chance to succeed. The Germans dissected and destroyed great portions of the Soviet Union. Compounding the problem was the heavy losses of men and materiel during the initial German onslaught. The Soviets were simply unable to field the armies of equal or greater size called for by Tukhachevskiy.

Eventually, as a result of German overextension, the vastness of the Russian land, the infamous Russian winter, and a newfound resolve of the Soviet soldier, the Soviets found the breathing space they needed to develop and field the requisite numbers and types of forces. Giving ground slowly, the Soviet High Command husbanded their most precious resources - their mechanized and tank forces - and concurrently began an agonizing and desperate military reeducation process. Revitalizing and, based on actual experiences, modifying the previous theories while concurrently manning and equipping the units their predecessors called for, the Red Army began in January 1943 to wrest the initiative from the overextended Germans.<sup>54</sup> Where initially in 1941 the Red Army fielded on average .8 - 1.0 battalions per kilometer of front, by late 1942

they fielded two to four battalions per kilometer of front. By 1944-45, the number was a staggering six to eight battalions and up to 240 artillery pieces per kilometer.<sup>55</sup> Two major operations, Jassy-Kishinev in August 1944 and the Oder-Vistula operation in January-February 1945, illustrate the tactical formations and densities that placed such a premium on control vice command. Both plans were based on scientific substantiation, meticulously coordinated, thoroughly war gamed and based on extensive reconnoitering.

The Jassy-Kishinev operation of August 1944 had as its goal the liberation of the Balkans and southern Europe, especially Rumania and its vital oil fields at Ploesti. Using one of the recognized operational level forms of maneuver, - the encirclement - the operation accomplished all its objectives and destroyed two German armies and captured virtually intact one Rumanian army. The operation involved ninety divisions divided into two fronts. The density across the front was one division per 5-6 kilometers. In the main attack sectors it was one maneuver division, 15-20 tanks, and 240 artillery pieces per kilometer. There was no room and consequently no requirement for division commanders to exercise any initiative.<sup>56</sup>



Another problem facing the Soviets at this point was the quality of the soldier. Between one-quarter and one-half of the Soviet forces were conscripts forcibly gathered from the countryside. The Red Army gave them a uniform, a rifle, and placed them in an infantry division.<sup>57</sup>

The Oder-Vistula operation, demonstrating the other operational offensive form of maneuver - the broad front multiple axes - involved even more forces with even greater densities. A total of 106 division equivalents took part in this action. Force ratios were 7:1 at the operational level and 15:1 at the tactical level. Densities ranged from .45 divisions per kilometer across the front to concentrations of 8-10 battalions per kilometer at the major points of attack.<sup>58</sup> Advancing more than 500 kilometers, this force decimated two German armies and two separate corps. The Soviet juggernaut continued inexorably until Berlin fell and the Third Reich was crushed.

The importance of the World War II experience cannot be overemphasized. The first part of the war was indeed expensive for the Soviet Union and vividly demonstrated the gap between the promises of the 1930s and the realities of 1941-1942. However, the Soviet

military leadership considered the Great Patriotic War a vindication of their philosophy of war. As envisioned, offenses and defenses were fought on the relatively flat and immense Russian plains. The battles had indeed required the enormous quantities of men and materiel that planners had theorized. The extent to which unit and subunit (division and below) commanders had any scope to exercise initiative was both extremely limited and largely unnecessary.<sup>59</sup>

Contrary to Soviet experiences, the German, British, and American official histories glorified the exploits of individuals and small units "fighting against the odds". The Soviet position was that actions of small unit leaders did not have an appreciable effect on the outcome of engagements and battles.<sup>60</sup> Mass had replaced a need for initiative.

This second great renaissance in Soviet military development often is ignored by the West because of the initial Soviet failures. However, the Soviets view World War II today as the most important source of military thought and application. Forged in blood and fire, it serves as the laboratory of analysis and a repository of experience that provides both concrete examples and inspiration.<sup>61</sup> The Great Patriotic War

continues to serve as both a vindication of the early work done by Tuhachevskiy, Triandafillov, and Svechin and confirmation that the doctrinal principles developed -- mass in terms of men and machines, scientific pre-battle preparation, and a system that facilitates the control of such an immense force -- were sound.

### THE NUCLEAR ERA AND TODAY

Nevertheless the decisive role in modern war will be played by such...factors as firmness of the rear, morale of the army, the quantity and quality of divisions, [emphasis added] the organizational ability of the command cadre and others...<sup>62</sup>

In the immediate post-World War II period Soviet military theorists concentrated on lessons learned in the war and applying them in the future. Two important factors, however, delayed any real analysis or benefit. First, Stalin was still premier and military authors, if they wanted to enjoy continued good fortune, had to acknowledge Stalin as the greatest military thinker of all time. Stalin's permanent operating factors had to be the basis of any lesson or conclusion. Secondly, the Soviets could not assess the impact of nuclear weapons on future war until they developed this capability. Their only answer to the US nuclear monopoly was the intellectually and militarily bankrupt strategy of multi-million man forces.<sup>63</sup>

With the development of a nuclear capability and the death of Stalin in 1954, the Soviet Union turned its complete attention to the study of nuclear weapons and their potential impact on war. The Soviets believed that future war would encompass all arenas - -

strategic, operational and tactical.<sup>64</sup> The abrupt change in correlation of forces, creation of zones of mass destruction and the potential damage to morale and the psychological state of troops that nuclear weapons could introduce almost instantaneously caused great concern to the Soviets.<sup>65</sup> However, the effects of nuclear weapons, particularly battlefield nuclear munitions, posed a paradox for the Soviets. The new weapons could devastate formations the Soviets had so painstakingly developed in the past war. However, the Soviets were not willing to discard the hard lessons learned and subsequent doctrinal validations so cavalierly.

The role of tactics had not diminished. To capitalize on the successes of strategic and operational nuclear strikes, it was necessary to complete the destruction of the enemy at the tactical and operational level, occupy his territory, and deprive him of the ability to regenerate a retaliatory capability.<sup>66</sup> The solution at the tactical level was twofold. First, the method of generating the requisite numbers of maneuver forces still deemed necessary to crush the enemy in Europe changed. Instead of masses of forces forming and converging on the designated

place, smaller formations would now travel on multiple routes, mass quickly, deliver the crushing blow and continue to press the attack along several axes. The movement by small units and the requirement for carefully coordinated attacks by concentrated forces forced an even greater emphasis on the control of small units.<sup>67</sup> Secondly, the Soviets mechanized all the forces expected to participate in a European conflict. The Soviets equipped their vehicles with the BMP and several generations of tanks with a nuclear-protective liner and outfitted the vehicles with an overpressure system to filter radiation and chemical contaminants. The Soviet forces were now equipped and armed to fight and win in the expected nuclear war environment.<sup>68</sup>

Beginning in the mid 1970s, the Soviets began to postulate that war would not be nuclear at the outset. Analysis of western writings coupled with their own research indicated to Soviet doctrine developers that war in Europe could be a conventional one. The requirements for victory -- crushing the enemy with irresistible, concentrated might -- would still be the preeminent form of tactical warfare.<sup>69</sup>

The threat of nuclear warfare at the tactical

level now became the principal concern. Again the Soviets only modified their proven doctrine. Forces would still advance along multiple routes to concentrate where needed. Now, however, the doctrine emphasized attacking throughout the tactical and operational depths the nuclear storage, delivery and command and control means of the opponent.<sup>70</sup>

In summation, Soviet tactical military doctrine has remained both constant in its requirement for massing of overwhelming numbers and flexible in how to achieve it. A tremendous amount of intellectual and practical effort went into the development of original Soviet warfighting capabilities that, because of the thoroughness of its design, required only modifications when faced with unforeseen developments. These modifications, like the original doctrine, are the product of the close interworking of government and military intellectuals.

More importantly though, the military practitioners who were required to implement the doctrine understood it. There was commonality in application which ranged from the strategic to the tactical levels.

### FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: WHERE DO WE STAND?

No details - don't go about setting machineguns on different sides of bushes. That is done a damn sight better by a platoon commander.<sup>71</sup>

As seen in the preceding sections, the Soviets developed, institutionalized and practiced a single military doctrine. Does the US Army organizationally practice what it preaches? After a decade plus of attempting to institutionalize the idea of Auftragstaktik, mission-type orders and all the attendant mental conditioning that this implies, how successful has the US Army been in inculcating this philosophy within its ranks? An analysis of peacetime training and wartime operations offers revealing insights into the Army's status.

First, there is not a consensus among the branches of what mission-type orders are. The Infantry School uses tactical tasks coupled with purposes. The Armor Center instructs officers to use types of operations and control measures as tasks and to use tactical tasks as purposes.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, our means of command and control stresses detailed preparation of an operation. These orders tend to emphasize centralized, detailed instructions to all subordinates in an effort to



synchronize all the "combat multipliers".<sup>73</sup> A vignette concerning the visit of a German general officer visiting a US division headquarters during a REFORGER exercise, recounted in several military publications, poignantly illustrates the point. The German asked to see a copy of the division's operations order. When handed a one-inch thick document, he commented that he did not want the division SOP, but rather the operations order. When told that this was the order, he just shook his head.

Secondly, there is a lack of understanding of underlying concepts and terms. One study examined students of the Combined Arms and Services Staff School, Command and General Staff Officers' Course, as well as divisional and National Training Center commanders and staff officers. Only 20% could define the characteristics of mission-type orders.<sup>74</sup> Also, only 19% of battalion task force commanders could articulate correctly a "commander's intent" statement.<sup>75</sup>

Analysis of operations orders issued by battalion task forces operating at the National Training Center indicates that most units do not practice mission-type orders. Only 27% of the mechanized infantry task

forces issued mission-type orders, while armor task forces issued mission-type orders just 17% of the time.<sup>76</sup>

Observations from Operation Desert Storm also reflect a trend not in keeping with Auftragstaktik. Robert Leonhard, in his book The Art of Maneuver, asserts:

...Operation Desert Storm was strictly controlled from the top down. There was no room for initiative, or even for significant maneuver options, below corps level. Commanders at all levels were instructed where and when to move and were not permitted to find their own way to the objectives.<sup>77</sup>

Leonhard goes on to take the Army to task for concluding that Desert Storm was a vindication of its move to mission-type orders. Leonhard bases his indictment on his own observations and discussions with his battalion and brigade commander, both of whom felt that they had no tactical decisions to make.<sup>78</sup> My own observations as a corps planner tend to support Leonhard's conclusions. One of the plans called for the corps attacking with two divisions abreast. Further, these divisions were directed to attack with two brigades abreast. The CENTCOM plan required destruction of forces in zone, while maintaining strict contact with adjacent units in order to minimize the threat of fratricide.<sup>79</sup> "How" to accomplish the

mission through control became the norm.

Control, by definition, restricts command. General Foss, former commanding general of the Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), warned us of the danger of control vice command, where technology and electronic devices can lead us toward the former.<sup>80</sup> The emerging developments in this area seem to foster a more centralized approach to conducting war. The temptation to control as a result of truly "seeing" the battlefield will be great.

New communications such as Mobile Subscriber Equipment allows the corps commander to consult a directory and dial a company commander anywhere on the battlefield.<sup>81</sup> One recalls the archetypical control scenario in Vietnam, with the battalion, brigade and division commanders hovering over a battle in their respective command and control helicopters, communicating with the company commander who is trying to conduct his fight.<sup>82</sup>

Enhancements in the intelligence acquisition and processing arena may also undermine an inclination to decentralize. Systems such as the Joint Surveillance and Target Acquisition Radar System can provide the commander with accurate (eight digit grid) and timely

information on the status of both sides.

Lastly, the Army's system of personnel rotation does not facilitate the building of the two-way trust implicit in such a philosophy. With a constant turn over of soldiers and NCOs, company commanders changing every 12 - 18 months and battalion commanders changing every 24 months, there is never the requisite time to know, nurture, and train subordinates. Contrast the US Army assignment policy with that of the Germans, where officers served with the same battalion and regiment in either command or staff positions for years.

The lack of standardization in terminology and dichotomies within the training system hinder the Army in its implementation of Auftragstaktik and mission-type orders. Subordinates, for the most part, do not understand it; seniors often do not practice it. The logical response is to control, not to command.

## LESSONS FROM THE SOVIET EXPERIENCE

What are the answers to the problems of the theory and reality of our doctrinal practices? Adopting the Soviet command and control version of *Befehlstaktik* is not the answer. Our institutional and cultural socialization probably precludes it. More importantly, it does not meet the requirements of the future. Our forces are small and getting smaller. The world situation is less well defined and becoming more vague as the new world order establishes itself. We will have neither the mass nor the envisioned scenario that makes *Befehlstaktik* viable. The fluidity of future operations now envisioned demands the flexibility in combat that only *Auftragstaktik* can provide. Therefore, the implementation of the tenets of *Auftragstaktik* should remain the goal. What then, can we learn from the (former) Soviet Army? The answer seems to lie not in the philosophy per se, but rather in the methodology that developed, implemented and sustained it.

First, the Soviets put their best minds to work on the problem. Unlike the US Army's attitude towards intellectuals,<sup>84</sup> the Soviets recognized and rewarded

their top thinkers. Indeed, the competition to obtain advanced degrees in the Soviet Army was very keen.<sup>95</sup> The Soviets administered and supervised the development of doctrine from the top down, and the doctrine developed encompassed all of the Soviet Armed Forces. The doctrine was then disseminated uniformly to all military academies, service and branch schools, and institutions of higher military learning.<sup>96</sup> These are the lessons we can draw from the Soviets.

Ideally, the doctrine for the US Army would fall under an umbrella of doctrine developed, implemented and enforced by a joint system. Joint doctrine is replacing the current method of memorandums of understanding and agreements between the services, particularly at the operational level, but it still has a ways to go.<sup>97</sup>

With or without an impetus provided by a joint doctrinal initiative, the US Army should centralize the development and implementation of Auftragstaktik. Under the auspices of TRADOC, a centralized board would first carefully consider, identify, and codify exactly what Auftragstaktik or mission-type orders are, and then define the terms that all would use. This is fundamentally critical because "a precise terminology

and language are absolutely necessary for the accurate transmission of ideas...".<sup>39</sup> Next, TRADOC must take the lead in developing a master training program for Auftragstaktik for implementation in all schools -- academies, Reserve Officer Training Corps, basic and advanced courses, CGSOC, and the senior service colleges. No longer should individual branches and schools have the latitude to interpret the meanings. TRADOC (and the Army) should also invest in the quality people necessary to inculcate these concepts throughout the Army's educational system. Lastly, and probably most difficult to implement, is that of a stabilized personnel base. The current system does not provide the opportunity for the development of subordinates. Trust is implicit in Auftragstaktik and developing trust demands time.

The Germans had over one hundred years to perfect Auftragstaktik while the Soviets devoted sixty plus years to their efforts. A decade's worth of effort by the US is too soon to sound the death knell for the Army's efforts. However, these suggestions are necessary if the Army is to fully reap the benefits it believes are there. Failure to implement the recommendations outlined will result in another

generation of officer understanding Auftragstaktik and its philosophy according to the vagaries and biases of his particular situation.



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